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**“The Prince of All the Rookies:” Remaking Working Class Masculinity  
and Heroism in *Traffic in Souls***

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**“The Prince of All the Rookies:” Remaking Working Class Masculinity  
and Heroism in *Traffic in Souls***

**by**

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**Report**

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## **Dedication**

To my parents who never told me to stop reading—even at the kitchen table.

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## **Abstract**

### **“The Prince of All the Rookies:” Remaking Working Class Masculinity and Heroism in *Traffic in Souls***

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This paper seeks to explore the role evolving masculinities played in the Progressive Era’s white slavery panic through one of the period’s most popular films: George Loane Tucker’s *Traffic in Souls* and its ensuing novelization by Eustace Hale Ball. In my argument, I hope to make visible the film’s discussion of masculinity neglected by earlier critics, and demonstrate how the film’s decision to structure police officer Burke’s heroism as an internal trait and then Ball’s decision to attribute Burke’s heroism to an ascribed set of classist, racist, and sexist properties anticipate the distance between two of the most iconic male characters of the age: Nick Carraway and Tom Buchanan in F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*.

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## **Introduction**

The Progressive Era witnessed the rise of a new erotic peril: white slavery. While prostitution had been a common feature of New York City's environment since the 1820s, city dwellers imagined that the women involved in prostitution presumably chose the occupation for its lucrative profits or because they were sexually deviant (Gilfoyle 18). White slavery differed from conventional prostitution due to its "advanced levels of commercialization" associated with the rise of Progressive Era big business, and, of course, through the kidnapping of its female victims (Stange 77). Consequently, the greed of white slavers and the market's desire for female bodies caused white slavery—no longer unequal economic structures or personal failings on the part of individual women.

The panic was so pervasive that cities were pressured to investigate the crime. Officials responded by creating Vice Committees, but "few of [the committees] found evidence of an organized trade" (Staiger 140). While Vice Committees failed to find a new form of prostitution, women were adopting new customs and roles. Middle class women were beginning to hold jobs outside the house and even go to college, effectively dismantling the cultural notion that a woman's place was as mistress of her domestic empire. Women's rights activists argued for the female vote, and women began to become more active and visible in public life (Stamp 50). This new woman was dubbed, uncreatively, the New Woman and she troubled long-held cultural notions about female nature.

Clearly the Progressive Era abounded with anxieties about women, but what about men? If male sexual greed was seen as a major factor in the inception of white slavery, how progressive was this era for men? This paper seeks to explore the role evolving masculinities played in the white slavery panic through one of the period's most



popular films: George Loane Tucker's *Traffic in Souls* and its ensuing novelization by Eustace Hale Ball.

While the New Woman emerged, new forms of masculinity were emerging as well. Gail Bederman observes in *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States 1880-1917* that while masculinity was hardly in crisis during the Progressive Era, it did undergo a vigorous remaking (15). She argues that the Victorian rhetoric of the self-made man and its attendant virtues of self-restraint and patience had no place in the early twentieth century as small-scale capitalism disappeared in the growth of big business (10). Bederman's focus on anxieties about growing capitalism mirror Margit Stange's assertion that expanding capitalism inspired the white slavery panic (77). Potentially then, as capitalism was imagined to drive the market for female bodies, it also forced men to become white slavers. Thus capitalism, along with immigration, working class men, and the New Woman all worked together to challenge older models of masculinity (14).

The desire to remake manhood naturally found its way into the film industry. Phillipa Gates observes that "popular film reacts to changing social conceptions of masculinity in an attempt to re-imagine those fragmented, changing, and contradictory notions of masculinity into a unified and unproblematic image of masculinity for its audiences," and *Traffic in Souls* was nothing if it was not popular (6). By 1925, twelve years after its 1913 release, it had grossed over \$475,000 from an initial budget of only \$5,700 ("Old production" x2).<sup>1</sup>

The film's plot features a search and rescue narrative in which a young woman (Little Sister) is kidnapped by white slavers and is saved by her elder sister (Mary), her

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<sup>1</sup> The film is also important in the history of cinema production. Ben Brewster notes that the film featured the first screenplay not based on an existing play or novel, and that its ninety minute run time made it a pioneer of feature-length filmmaking (Brewster 37).

sister's police officer fiancé (Officer Burke) and the rest of the police department. Through Mary and her father Mr. Barton's ingenuity, the culprit of the white slavery circle is revealed to be Mary's boss, Trubus, a wealthy businessman and, ironically, the leader of the International Purity and Reform League which works to abolish white slavery. The unveiling of Trubus's alternative business ruins him and his family while the Barton family is restored to respectability by the film's conclusion. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the film has become an object of feminist criticism as critics attempt to locate or dislocate Mary Barton in the mold of the New Woman. By focusing on Mary, however, such scholarship neglects how the film addresses men and masculinity.

It may seem a counterintuitive impulse to claim that a film about female sex trafficking can and does address masculinity. Yet, the fact that Ball's novelization of the film greatly expands Burke's character and features conversations in which characters define what constitutes proper masculinity suggests that the film's original viewers noticed its portrayal of masculinity. The novel's existence suggests that audience interest in the film's masculinity was great enough to merit a revised version of *Traffic in Souls* which further addressed the topic.

While contemporary critics have not yet investigated masculinity in *Traffic in Souls*, many Progressive Era reformers and critics did consider what merit the film might have for male viewers (Stamp 95). Although the question of gendered spectatorship did not arise for *Traffic in Souls*, reviews of its contemporary, *The Inside of the White Slave Traffic*, did raise this question. Chicago reformer Gertrude Howe Brown wrote: "The pictures would have a good effect on girls—to show them what they have to guard against...but I think it would be a different result when shown to boys" (Stamp 95). William L. Bodine agreed that the film "might give warning of the white slave pitfalls if it could be exhibited only to girls over sixteen and their mothers. Its lesson for men—

especially young men and boys—is bad, showing them how to become white slavers” (Stamp 95). These critics’ comments concern vice films, but they also reveal a deeper social anxiety about boys’ ability—or inability—to develop proper masculinity when exposed to images of corrupted masculinity.

The existing criticism on *Traffic in Souls* is haunted by the same masculine menace imagined by Progressive Era critics. Shelley Stamp’s and Janet’s Staiger’s prevailing feminist readings discuss how the public/private binary functions within the film to structure female propriety. While both critics agree that the film castigates Little Sister because she fails to navigate public space properly, they disagree about Mary’s role in the film. Stamp argues that “Mary is associated above all with a respect for patriarchy and chaste adherence to the law” and is therefore not a New Woman (Stamp 77). Staiger’s earlier reading proposes that Mary represents the New Woman’s potential in Progressive Era society through her active role in her sister’s rescue and her conservative behavior in the public sphere (Staiger 140). While Stamp may disagree with Staiger’s analysis, Staiger does acknowledge the conditional limits of Mary’s power within the patriarchal structure her character inhabits (143). For both critics, Mary’s power or lack thereof is shaped by equally, if not more powerful, patriarchal forces.

Yet neither critic pursues the ramifications that arise from their readings’ demonization of masculine power, especially considering that what Burke reveals about masculinity is not affiliated with masculine vice in the film. Stamp regards Burke not as an individual character, but rather as another representation of the patriarchy curtailing Mary’s independence (Stamp 77). Staiger more readily recognizes Mary and Burke’s partnership, but while she identifies Mary as the New Woman, Burke becomes “the Law” (Staiger 140). Burke and Mary’s engagement obviously links the pair together as man

and woman, but both Stamp and Staiger fall short of considering how the film might model proper masculine behavior through Burke.

Christopher Diffie's "Sex and the City: The White Slavery Scare and Social Governance in the Progressive Era" provides a legal reading of the film, but does not fully address the question of gender. Diffie rejects the public and private binary to demonstrate how the film utilizes the erotic danger of white slavery to reread the dualism between public and private space (Diffie 412). He concludes that, through the fusion of state social regulation and domestic privacy, the film allows Trubus's brothel to become "a symptom of veiled internal rot" rather than a moral contagion (425). While Diffie's reimagining of the Trubus home as the epicenter of moral decay is compelling, he neglects the gendered implications of this scandal. Since Trubus's exposure also signals the ruin of Mrs. and Miss Trubus, his argument implicitly demonstrates that within the private home not even the power of law can prevent women's social and economic ruin from men's actions. The public/private binary explored by all three critics signals the presence of another binary: male/female. But where Stamp and Staiger have explored the film's depiction of women, criticism has yet to fully consider what the film posits about men.

How might we read Officer Burke, whom the film clearly posits as the antidote to the corrupted masculinity of Trubus and the other white slavers? Exploring Burke's merit as an individual necessitates a return to the film's melodramatic origins. Though melodrama's "ethics beyond politics" do obscure the structural causes of prostitution in *Traffic in Souls*, it also allows Burke (and Mary) to emerge as individual heroes (Berlant 638). The film supplies their heroism as a model of personal conduct for viewers. At the end of the film, it is Burke, and not Trubus the "eminent philanthropist" whose reputation and family emerges untarnished. Burke's heroism and Trubus's amorality—and their

attendant implications for masculinity—are framed by class dimensions. Thus the film's conclusion reveals that the working class man can triumph over the wealthy man who attempts to exploit him. Burke's victory is as much over class as it is Victorian forms of masculinity.

However, in Ball's novelization of *Traffic in Souls* Burke becomes a member of the upper class himself at the plot's conclusion. This change rewrites the working class victory of the film, and affirms seemingly older forms of social stratification which suggest that Burke's heroism is only endemic to the upper classes. The tension between Burke's divergent portrayals represent the complexity of remaking masculinity in the Progressive Era, but it also discloses the greater tension about what constituted masculine heroism in the time period. In my argument, I hope to make visible the film's discussion of masculinity neglected by earlier critics, and demonstrate how the film's decision to structure Burke's heroism as an internal trait and then Ball's decision to attribute Burke's heroism to an ascribed set of classist, racist, and sexist properties anticipate the distance between two of the most iconic male characters of the age: Nick Carraway and Tom Buchanan in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*.

## Burke and Trubus: A Class Apart

While the abduction and rescue of Little Sister is *Traffic in Souls*'s climax, it is actually the second abduction and rescue plot in the film. Earlier, Burke single-handedly saves three kidnapped women from Trubus's white slavers before Little Sister is taken. This prior action allows the film to establish the various discourses of masculinity in which Burke emerges as the ideal hero. This heroic structuring relies on some elements of the detective film since Burke plays the role of the detective. Though *Traffic in Souls* predates the classic detective film genre, it shares striking similarities with some of its conventions. The genre is "about containment and closure" of social fears hinging on crime and gender, and the detective character becomes "the ultimate line of defense for society from evil" since "the villains no matter how seemingly unstoppable—are eventually brought to justice" (Gates 25). The genre may also "offer conservative messages about race, class, and gender," but Burke shatters the stereotype of the corrupt police officer and, in the spirit of its Progressive Era roots, allows *Traffic in Souls* to offer not conservative, but innovative ideas concerning masculinity and class (25).

Trubus's corruption is presented in terms of class. Scenes of him counting money received from the sales of girls indicate that prostitution revenue supports his upper class comfort. The association of money and moral decay represents wealth as a corrupting force. Thus, the capitalist greed is what Burke must contain. The film's closure comes from the sense that the value of a man lies not in his wealth, but in his heroic qualities. The linkage of Burke's and Trubus's conduct and class speaks to how reconstructing masculinity in the Progressive Era was in large part a reevaluation of middle class masculinity in the face of corporate capitalism which eradicated the stability once afforded by most middle class male occupations (Bederman 10).

*Traffic in Souls* begins not with a crime, as we might expect in a detective film, but with an introduction to the structures and spaces that enable crime later in the film. The film opens with what Diffie has dubbed “triangulated social spaces” (425). The film cuts from the Barton household, to the Trubus household—then to the brothel. Tucker’s abandonment of parallel editing early on spoils the rule of “fair-play” for the detective film as the audience can already surmise that the brothel is the link between the two houses (Gates 15).

The scenes of the Barton and Trubus families also allow the film to quickly establish their class differences. Mary Barton—identified by her intertitle as the “head of the household”—hurries around the modest apartment preparing herself for work and her disabled father for his day, while less industrious Little Sister scrambles to catch up. Burke is already on patrol when Mary greets him on her way to work. Meanwhile in the Trubus household Trubus is also identified as “head of the household” and reads the paper while servants wait on him—luxuries unavailable to Burke and the Bartons. But tellingly, Trubus is reading about himself in the paper. One article addresses his position as head of the International Purity and Reform League—an organization devoted to eradicating “the infamous *Traffic in Souls*.” His wife then directs his attention to another paper featuring a rumor about his daughter’s engagement to “the greatest society catch of the season”—something which pleases them. The wealth of Trubus’s surroundings, his ability to perform charity work, and his family’s presence in a society gossip column all suggest that Trubus is, as his intertitle states, “the man higher up,” in regards to class compared to Burke and the Bartons.

Trubus and Burke are more obviously juxtaposed in the scenes following their morning routines. Once Trubus goes to work, the film reveals how the brothel links his household and the Bartons. In his office, Trubus secretly spies on the activities of the

white slavers beneath him—revealing that he is the head of the system. Thus, while Trubus may economically be “the man higher up,” the epithet’s moralistic overtone becomes ironic when his true occupation is exposed. The duplicity of the white slavery ring is doubled by Trubus’s spying on his own people. His surveillance of the slavers mimics the surveillance the slavers conduct on the girls they plot to abduct. Clearly, Trubus’s position with the International Purity and Reform League is a public façade used to hide his crooked business. If Trubus represents the Victorian gentleman, rather than defending such a class the film suggests that such men maintain their lifestyle through the objectification and exploitation of women’s bodies.

Burke greets Mary as she walks to work before the scene with Trubus, but the significance of the encounter only emerges after Trubus’s true nature is revealed. Upon seeing Mary, Burke attempts to kiss her—which she refuses because a male window cleaner is watching. Burke respects Mary’s modesty, and motions for the window cleaner to look away so they can kiss. Unlike Trubus, Burke’s control of surveillance does not rely on technological mastery, but on his physical presence. This implicitly suggests that Burke may be more powerful than Trubus. Furthermore, Burke’s ability to direct the other man’s gaze comes in part from the cleaner’s consent to look away. This suggests that Burke accepts his autonomy in a manner that Trubus does not extend to his employees. Lastly, the scene juxtaposes Burke’s respect for women against Trubus’s desire to commodify female bodies.



## The Police in the Progressive Era Imagination

Burke's moral fortitude and Trubus's amorality contradicted the prevailing historic opinions concerning officers and upper class reformers. Journalism contemporaneous with *Traffic and Souls* suggest that police officers were allies of white slavery. One *New York Times* article reads "the police...serve to aid the traffic through their laxity of law enforcement, where they do not actually cloak and protect it" (5). Ironically, for viewers of *Traffic in Souls*, the same article attributes citizen's efforts to eradicate white slavery as "particularly a business men's movement" which invokes images of Trubus's International Purity and Reform League. Clearly, *Traffic in Souls* rewrites these assumptions.

Theodore Roosevelt's autobiography also attempts to revise Progressive Era opinion on police officers. Roosevelt himself has been identified by masculinity scholars as a paragon for masculinity in the time period (Bederman 170; Pettegrew 220). Roosevelt felt "that male power was composed of equal parts kindhearted manly chivalry and aggressive masculine violence," and judging from his positive opinions on police officers in his autobiography, we can assume that Roosevelt saw the officers as embodying his own code of masculinity (Bederman 172). Roosevelt devotes an entire chapter of his autobiography to his brief time as commissioner of the New York Police Department. Though Roosevelt was commissioner from 1895-1897, he spends a large portion of the chapter defending the police of the contemporary moment from public villainy—generally through anecdotes of their selfless heroism (Roosevelt 205). His autobiography was published in 1913—the same year as *Traffic in Souls* was released—and so we can imagine that his own defense of police officers was concurrent with *Traffic in Souls*'s positive portrayal of officers. Both Roosevelt and the film suggest that, despite

some occasional failures, the New York police force is peopled with heroic men—such as Burke.

Consequently, Burke's heroism is supplemented by his affiliation with the police, and not subsumed by it. Guy Reel argues that Progressive Era newspapers and tabloids "often treated law enforcement officers with nuance, as vehicles to display many of the same challenges and approaches to masculinities that faced the primarily male readers" (182). Reel states by frequently casting officers in manly roles such as "heroes, protectors, crime fighters and solvers, and peacemakers," officers became "both barometers and guardians" of these manly ideals. Officers' subsequent successes or failures on the job led them to be cast "as either heroic working men or incompetent boobs" (184). Accordingly in these tabloids, a successful officer was also a successful man. This is the structure adopted in the first part of *Traffic in Souls*, which follows the abduction and rescue of the country girl and Swedish immigrants. It showcases not only the manliness of the police force as a whole, but how Burke is extraordinary even among the other officers.

## **Just Another Day On The Job: Burke's Heroic Masculinity**

The first abduction and rescue plot demonstrates Burke's ability to morally and physically uphold the qualities of the hero. After the film's introductory scenes, the police captain gets a telegram that white slavers may be afoot in the city. When the captain summons the officers to his office for debriefing, they meticulously line up and march in step with each other. Their queue is reminiscent of a military parade, indicating that they are declaring war on the white slavers. The men salute the captain as one, demonstrating their respect for him. Scenes where they joke together display their solidarity for each other. The officers' solidarity, organization, and respect for their captain oppose the depiction of the white slavers in the previous scene in which they quarrel, flirt, and defy authority.

First, the country girl arrives at the train station, appearing lost. Sensing opportunity, one of Trubus's white slavers approaches her and attempts to send her in the wrong direction. A police officer stationed in the background notices the exchange, roughly shoves the white slaver away, and gives the girl the right directions. The scene is filmed from an omniscient standpoint. The camera remains stationary while the white slaver, the officer, and the country girl, interact in its space. The de-emphasis of the characters serves to highlight the action, and how erotic peril functions in the urban landscape. The metaphor of the scene is obvious: the white slaver attempts to send the woman down the wrong path, while the police officer guides the country girl to the right path and enables her to maintain her virtue. The officer's ability to help the country girl remain on the virtuous path is in part due to his own status as a virtuous man. But the officer fails to realize that the white slaver is one of many working in a complex web. When the country girl is lost a second time, the white slavers manage to apprehend her.

Next, the film brings us to Ellis Island where white slavers attempt to capture two Swedish sisters. The slavers stage a “frame-up” to remove the girls’ brother. The “frame-up,” like the scene at the train station, employs an omniscient camera focus. Rather than reveal how erotic peril works in such an instance, the “frame-up” relies on the calculated deployment of masculine aggression and honor. One of the white slavers purposely shoves the brother, and feigns anger. Unmoved towards violence, the brother attempts to explain that he is faultless, and the white slaver then punches him. Physically assaulted twice, the brother finally retaliates and slaps the white slaver. This confrontation reveals a script of masculinity. If one man acts violently towards another, the first man will eventually react with violence. The white slaver’s ploy to physically hit the immigrant brother until he reacts violently reveals the universality of the trope—even non-American men will follow this script. But of course, brawling in the street is unacceptable; the white slavers use the brother’s response as a means to call two officers over to mediate the confrontation. Separating the brother from his sisters is the policemen’s first mistake. Secondly, the policemen allow the other white slaver—who has been posing as the brother’s friend the entire time—to escort his sisters to the brothel. If the country girl was vulnerable because she was alone, the case of the sisters demonstrates that male guardians, like family members and police officers, can still be waylaid by clever and manipulative white slavers. In both instances, none of the officers act wrongly, but they all fail to demonstrate the strategic predisposition for heroism needed to stop the white slavers.

After the failure of the other officers to apprehend the white slavers, the scene cuts to Burke outside of the brothel containing both the Swedish sisters and the country girl. Here, the omniscient camera perspective is abandoned for parallel editing. As Burke inspects the hastily created “Swedish Employment Agency” sign outside, inside the white

slavers violently restrain the struggling Swedish sisters. The heightening of suspense, and the focus on Burke, suggest that he must play the role of the hero if the girls are to be saved. Burke does not disappoint the audience. He assesses the situation and decides to intervene.

Burke's confrontation with the white slavers demonstrates his superior morality and physicality. Caught in the act, the white slaver attempts to give Burke a bribe. Burke directly undercuts the stereotype that officers accept bribes when he refuses the money. Unlike Trubus, Burke can resist the corrupting power of wealth. Furthermore, Burke refuses the money by tucking it into the white slaver's pocket—trespassing onto his masculine body. The exchange echoes the struggle minutes ago in the same foyer where white slavers invaded the Swedish girls' bodily space to restrain them from escape. After returning the bribe, Burke smashes a sign over the white slaver's head, and uses violence to quickly gain control of the situation. Outnumbered by about eight to one, Burke demonstrates his command of violence and physical prowess. During the fight, he loses his hat and quickly replaces it—reminding viewers of the connection between his heroic efforts and officer status. The film contrasts the corrupting power of money and Burke's moral fortitude immediately after the fight, where scenes of Burke herding the white slavers at gunpoint with liberated women huddled behind him are intercut with scenes of Trubus and the Go-Between counting money. Although Trubus and Burke did not confront each other physically, the parallel scenes suggest that the true combatants in the previous battle were Burke's moral fortitude and Trubus's alluring bribe.

After arrests and reunions take place back in the police station, we witness Trubus once again reading the newspaper. This scene parallels our introduction to Trubus, except rather than reading about himself, he reads about Burke. The nature of the stories concerning each character is quite different. Whereas Trubus was cited primarily for his

passive role as the head of the International Purity and Reform League, Burke's raid against the brothel is described as "sensational" and accomplished "single-handedly"—both words conveying the heroism of Burke's actions. Furthermore, the irony between the International Purity and Reform League's mission to eradicate white slavery while its leader runs a white slavery ring, and Burke's shut-down of one of his brothels, is obvious. If Trubus becomes a subject of journalism due to his wealth and false philanthropy, Burke is offered as a man worthy of reading about because of his deeds—not because he is wealthy. This sentiment is echoed when other characters are pictured reading the paper such as the Go-Between and Mr. Barton. Burke's appearance in the paper returns us to Guy Reel's assertion that newspaper and tabloid articles about the police were vital scripts of masculinity to their male readers (182). Thus, at the end of the first part of the film, Burke proves that while words are powerful—if not necessarily accurate—true heroism is defined through self-evidently virtuous action.

## **The New Woman and the New Man**

While Burke emerges as the ideal manly hero in the first part of *Traffic in Souls*, Little Sister's rescue in the second part is indebted to Mary (Staiger 138). As previously discussed, critics remain skeptical of Mary's feminism within her partnership with Burke, and assume that Burke is implicated in the patriarchal structures which inhibit women's autonomy throughout the film (Staiger 143, Stamp 77). But these readings overlook that, rather than working against patriarchy, the collaboration of Mary and Burke exceeds the confinement of a rigid male/female relationship. Their partnership is clearly a positive force in the film's action, and thereby, it challenges historical claims that the New Woman was a threat to masculinity (Bederman 14).

Staiger notes that Mary's identification as the head of her household on the film's first intertitle is indicative of some power (Staiger 117). As head of the household Mary is not a passive instrument of patriarchy, but rather she utilizes Mr. Barton's and Burke's skills in her quest to find Little Sister (Stamp 77). Mary urges Burke to "find [her] sister" when she is missing after work. Burke sets off while holding a newspaper, presumably the paper which contains the story of his heroism. This token of his earlier heroism reminds the audience of his effectiveness against the white slavers. However, this time, Burke is searching for Little Sister not as a police officer, but as her future brother-in-law. The film visually demarcates Burke's different roles by showing him searching for Little Sister in his plainclothes as opposed to his uniform. Sending Burke rather than herself to search for Little Sister is moreover a calculated move to protect Mr. Barton from knowing about the disappearance, which further highlights Mary's role as the head of household. It is only when Burke fails to discover Little Sister that Mary reveals to him that she has disappeared.

The misfortunes of the Barton family continue the next day. When Little Sister's disappearance appears in the newspapers, Mary's boss "discharge[es] her on account of her sister's disgrace." It is unclear whether he fires her because of the bad publicity the Barton name has brought to the candy shop, or because he believes Mary might have dubious morals like Little Sister. Both reasons suggest that the Barton family is at fault for Little Sister's individual actions, particularly when it comes to female virtue. Since the audience's sympathies lie with Mary, the film might be critiquing such a patriarchal view of propriety and women. Luckily, Mrs. Trubus also seems to feel that Mary's dismissal is unjustified, and through her Mary gets a job as Trubus's secretary.

This fortuitous development ignites a string of events that led to Little Sister's rescue and Trubus's downfall. In these final scenes, Mary is essential. She bravely discovers Trubus's spying device and follows a line from Trubus's office down the fire escape and discovers the room where the white slavers gather. She notifies Burke and Mr. Barton, and she and Burke work together to install one of Mr. Barton's inventions to record the white slavers' conversations. Mary gathers the evidence and brings it to Burke's captain while Burke follows a white slaver to the second brothel location. Mary tags along on the ensuing raid, though she stays away from the fighting. Throughout, though Mary is occasionally nervous, she remains composed. Janet Staiger is right to observe that Mary is not given the climax of the rescue—where Burke shoots the cadet and he falls from the building—but Burke's act of heroism could have hardly occurred without Mary's help in the events leading to the second raid (Staiger 143).

Throughout Little Sister's abduction and rescue, the film juxtaposes the Barton family's struggles to Trubus's comfort. Little Sister is shown praying in the brothel, then the scene moves to the Trubus parlor where Trubus and Mrs. Trubus happily kiss their daughter goodnight and the intertitle states: "the peaceful and happy good night of the



head of the infamous system.” After, the scene cuts to Little Sister fainting on the floor, and then the scene changes to Mary finally confessing Little Sister’s disappearance to Mr. Barton. They hold each other in despair, and the camera offers a fade-out shot whose darkness closing around them metaphorically mirrors their state of mind. The scene of the happy and intact Trubus family intercut with scenes of the Barton’s grieving further underscores the fact that the Trubuses’ comfort comes at the cost of another family’s despair.

After the police clear out the brothel, the action moves to the Trubus household where Trubus and his wife are arranging their daughter’s betrothal. An intertitle reveals: “The proudest moment of Trubus’s life.” As the men shake hands, police walk in and arrest Trubus. The intertitle suggests that Trubus’s fatherly pride in part is linked to the proper regulation of his daughter’s sexuality through marriage. Additionally, Trubus’s investment in marriage for his daughter underscores the hypocrisy of his white slavery ring. The suitor and his family immediately leave when Trubus is taken away. Miss Trubus is devastated, and Mrs. Trubus contracts an illness and dies. Thus, the violence Trubus’s white slavery ring inscribed on women’s bodies resolves itself by returning violence on the bodies and minds of the Trubus women.

The anguish and fragmentation of the Trubus family is juxtaposed against the restored Barton family. In the final shot of the Bartons, Little Sister and Mary are sandwiched between Mr. Barton and Burke. Little Sister kneels before the seated Mr. Barton while Mary holds her and Burke stands behind Mary. Through the cooperation of the New Woman and Man, the Barton family is restored. After this reunion, the scene moves to the jailhouse. The camera slowly pans across the occupied cells, showing the white slavers, madams, and Trubus himself. The scene removes Trubus from his class by visually including him with his true social peers: other criminals. Trubus’s final scene—

collapsing with grief at the bedside of his dead wife—features another fade-out shot which surrounds the ruined patriarch by darkness before “The End” appears on screen. Certainly this is the end for Trubus, whose actions have ruined both him and his family. This conclusion suggests that it is not the public or private divide that causes white slavery, but rather the unchecked greed of a bloated aristocracy, and that combating this class requires heroic acts from men and women alike.

## **A Different Story: The Novelization of *Traffic in Souls***

Masculinity is even more pronounced in Eustace Hale Ball's 1914 novelization of *Traffic in Souls*. The novel is faithful to the film's basic plot, but also features some drastic changes. While in the film either Burke or Mary could be read as the main protagonist, Ball chooses to make Burke the protagonist. Additional background information on Burke also reveals that he is not working class, but was once the son of wealthy parents and was cheated out of his fortune. Burke's new male confidants, including Mr. Barton, his police captain, and Dr. MacFarland, speak to Burke about the state of society, and men's roles within it by. The dialogues between Burke and the elder men provide both him and the reader with clear instructions on how to be a man. Framed within the philosophies of his male mentors, Burke's heroism in the book is more the result of adhering to certain social philosophies and less the result of individual actions. Ball's return to more conservative notions of gender and class in the film, coupled with his virulent attack on immigrants, and the call for the white upper classes to provide social relief to white workers, seems to arrest the more progressive ideas of the film and instead argues for a return to traditional masculine and class values.

Ball alters the gender dynamics by portraying Mary as Burke's subordinate. This decision destroys much of the "equity of the sexes" that could be read in the film (Staiger 143). When we meet Mary, she brings flowers to Mr. Barton in the hospital where Burke and Mr. Barton have first met. By forming a relationship between Mr. Barton and Burke before Burke meets Mary, Ball makes Mr. Barton Burke's primary connection to the Barton family, unlike in the film where Burke and Mary appear closer. Furthermore, Mary is not introduced as the head of the household. In fact, her visit to Mr. Barton seems more like the action of a dutiful daughter, not the head of a household. When Burke sees

Mary, he describes her as “delicate”—which is certainly not Mary’s first impression in the film (Ball 14). Burke and Mary are not yet engaged in the book, and their subsequent scenes together under Mr. Barton’s watchful eye are scenes of courtship, not partnership. Mary participates in Little Sister’s rescue as she does in the film, but lacks fortitude. Ball includes Burke in scenes which excluded him the film, seemingly to highlight Mary’s dependence on him. For example, in the film when Mary brings the police captain the dictograph’s evidence, she listens to it with him before Burke arrives. In the book, Burke listens to the evidence with them while Mary sobs and Burke holds her. This prompts the captain to remark, “don’t cry, little girl. We’ll attend to [your sister]” (Ball 255). This sentence infantilizes Mary, and assures readers that the action of the rescue will happen through the police because “they’ll” find [her] sister,” not Mary. Once Little Sister is restored to the Barton family, Burke proposes to Mary. Their engagement at the end of the plot’s action, rather than throughout, makes Mary seem like a prize rather than a partner.

While Mary’s subordination reveals the diminished female power in the novel, Ball includes even more explicit passages about the rightful place of women. Ball features a new character in the novel, the police physician Dr. Macfarland, who becomes a mentor for Burke. Macfarland is a staunch supporter of maintaining the Victorian notion of the domestic angel. He informs Burke: “Woman is weaker than man when it comes to brute force; you know it is force which does rule the world when you get down to it, in government, in property, in business, in education” thus “A woman should be in the home; she can raise babies, for which Nature intended her” (Ball 71). Macfarland then focuses on the danger of the “feminist movement” which leads “younger woman away from the old ideals of love and home and religion” and “will change the chivalry, which it has taken men a thousand years to cultivate, into brutal methods, when men

realize that women want absolute equality” which will lead to “a tidal wave of lust” (Ball 72-3). Curiously, Ball asserts that the erosion of chivalry will lead to “brutal methods” against women. He seemingly holds the feminists accountable for the violence men might commit against them and for the decline of acceptable masculine behaviors. While the doctor blames feminism for destroying gendered virtues, he also admits that some women are “naturally bad” and this “has come from some trait of another generation, some weakness which has been increased instead of cured by all this twisted, tangled thing we call modern civilization” (Ball 78). Clearly, the novelization of *Traffic in Souls* does not suggest that the New Woman can be a partner for the New Man. In fact, the New Woman can destroy man and the destruction of chivalric masculinity will lead to the collapse of civilization.

Prostitution is also characterized as a disease of civilization according to the doctor. MacFarland states that prostitution has “caused the ruin of the Roman Empire; it brought the downfall of mediaeval Europe, and whenever a splendid civilization springs up the curse of sex-bondage in one form or another grows with it like a cancer” (Ball 70). Macfarland believes that white slavery’s manifestation may be a harbinger of his society’s impending doom, and blames increased levels of immigration for this new form of sex trafficking. He argues white slavery “has been caused by the swarms of ignorant emigrants, by the demand of the lowest classes of those emigrants and the Americans they influence for a satisfaction of their lust” (Ball 70). The slippage between the “lowest classes” of immigrants and Americans suggest that not only is the immigrant to blame for his own debauched desires, but he is a contagion because he can infect the American with his immorality. Macfarland’s racialization of the immigrants allows him to obscure discussions of class with race, which was not uncommon in the Progressive Era (Bederman 30). But this obscuration also allows Macfarland to establish a strong sense of

American nationalism necessarily linked to American masculinity. After all, he states American men must be influenced by the immigrants to participate in white slavery, implying that American men would not partake of this vice without external influence. Furthermore, in Macfarland's speech against white slavery, the female victims themselves merit little attention. In his rhetoric, if white slavery is a degradation of civilization, the bodies of the violated girls are symbolic of American civilization. Consequently for Macfarland, the ruination of civilization coincides with a violation of white female virtue, particularly by non-American men.

If feminists and immigrant men are partially to blame for the endangered masculinity and subsequent decline of civilization in the novel, so are changing economic structures for middle class men. Mr. Barton confirms Bederman's assertion that the Progressive Era experienced shrinking opportunities of small-scale capitalism for men. He informs Burke that he "had devoted the best years of his life to the interests of his employer" but when his employer died, Mr. Barton states that "the services of old Barton were little appreciated by the [new employer] or his board of directors. It was a familiar story of modern business life" (Ball 42). While Mr. Barton seems at peace with how his lot has fallen—crippled, unemployed, and shamefully forced to rely upon his daughters' incomes—this sentimental ploy is supposed to outrage readers.

Despite Mr. Barton's resignation to his fate, he also feels that large business owners—such as his former boss—have a duty to their lower class employees:

You business men who sit here so happy and so contented with honorable wives, with sturdy children in whose veins run the blood of dozens of generations of decent living, do you realize that there are any other conditions in life but yours? Do you know that Henry Brown, Joe Smith, and Richard Black who work as clerks for you...do not have [your luxuries]...Does it occur to you that these

young men on their slender salaries may be supporting more people back home than you are? (Ball 157-8).

“Dozens of generations of decent living” suggests that a wealthy lifestyle is hereditary, which invokes the aristocracy America supposedly does not have. His focusing on the salaries of young men, and not woman, keeps his speech in line with the gender essentialism preached by Macfarland. Mr. Barton’s fictional workers, “Henry Brown, Joe Smith, and Richard Black,” all possess seemingly Anglo-American names which suggest that his sympathy extends to white American men only. Mr. Barton argues that Christian charity is insufficient for these young workers, and that the wealthy should not “condescend and offer [the lower classes] tracts and abstracts of the Scriptures—but to improve the moral conditions under which they work, the sanitary conditions, and to arrange decent places for them to amuse themselves after hours” (Ball 158). Barton urges the wealthy to spend less time in their social clubs, and devote it better the lives of their inferiors.

Mr. Barton warns that if the wealthy do not offer to help the working class, dire consequences will ensue:

Let me tell you that if you do not, during the next five or ten years, the people of these classes will imbibe still more to the detriment of our race, the anarchy and money lust which is being preached to them daily, nightly and almost hourly by the socialists, the anarchists and the atheists, who are all soured on life because they've never had it...The tide of social unrest...will engulf our civilization unless it is stopped by the jetties of social assistance and the breakwaters of increased moral education... Unless you do take the interest, unless you do fight to stem the movement of these dwarfed and bitter leaders, unless you do overcome their arguments based on much solid-rock truth by definite personal work, by definite

constructive education, your civilization, my civilization and the civilization of all the centuries will fall before socialism and anarchy. (Ball 158-160)

Mr. Barton's fervent speech—which spans over three pages in its entirety—seems like a prophecy for an apocalypse. His use of the second person “you” throughout is a call to arms suggesting that each individual man is personally responsible for either the destruction or salvation of civilization. Additionally, since Mr. Barton is simultaneously addressing “you business men” and Burke, his “you and my civilization” further underscores the implication that civilization belongs to white and male citizens. He also imagines America as one history of many in a universal white past by picturing Western civilization as spanning through “all the centuries.” This suggests that the failure of American men to arrest civil disobedience may lead to a collapse of Western civilization as a whole. Yet while he acknowledges that the “socialists, the anarchists, and the atheists” are powerful, his speech neatly returns power into the hands of upper class white men, for only they can prevent the country's ruin. By defining these men and Burke as the heroes capable of saving civilization, Ball affirms their masculine power. Thus, heroism in the novel is defined as following certain social principles, and not derived from individual action.

It seems unusual that Mr. Barton chides wealthy men earlier for not considering the working class, yet he does not hypothesize that the opulence of the wealthy could be a cause of social unrest. This lack of insight, coupled with Mr. Barton's demonization of alternative economic ideologies such as socialism or anarchy, posits that while Mr. Barton champions social relief for the working class, he has no interest in dismantling the capitalist structure which enables income inequality in the first place. These seemingly contradictory impulses reveal a split in the novel's discourse on masculinity. If masculine heroism is demonstrated through social relief, then a hero can only emerge from the



upper classes. Working class men can never embody this masculinity themselves, but must remain recipients of upper class benevolence. Thus, the masculinity and power of the wealthy is doubly preserved from both immigrant and working class influences.

Burke shares Mr. Barton's opinions on the responsibilities of the wealthy—perhaps because he is upper-class in origin himself. He states “we might look after Americans first for a while instead of letting in more scum” because “honest men have to pay higher taxes to take care of the peasants of Europe” (Ball 138). Ball writes at this point that Burke “echoed the sentiments of a great many of his fellow citizens” who are not “making fortunes from the prostitution of worker's brain and brawn” (Ball 138). The narrator astutely notes that the large immigrant population protects the interests of “big business owners and anarchists” against the interests of working class Americans (139). While Burke may seem to be attacking the wealthy upper classes, his attack is limited to irresponsible capitalists who benefit from the “prostitution” of labor—a clear nod to white slavery. Thus, the good capitalists—the men who choose to help the community by supporting white American men—are excluded from his admonishment.

Why do the men in the novelization of *Traffic in Souls* advocate for social assistance, yet fear that “[t]his can't be done by passing laws” because “government regulation will never serve man, nor woman, for it cannot cover all the ground” (Ball 76)? Christopher Diffie cautions us from assuming that the rise of state social assistance meant a rise of state social policing during the Progressive Era. Rather, the policing of moral actions fell onto individuals and communities (420). If social assistance can improve lower class morality—as all the men in *Traffic in Souls* argue that it can—then naturally it is the imperative of the wealthy to police the morality of the lower classes they are beseeched to assist. Therefore, the split in masculinity Mr. Barton reveals which allows the wealthy to remain the heroic guardians of civilization while forcing the

working classes to remain their beneficiaries is further reinforced by the absence of governmental support.

If wealthy men are the guardians of civilization, the logic of why Burke and Mr. Barton ascend to the upper class at the novel's conclusion is clearer. Immediately after Burke proposes to Mary, Mr. Barton produces a letter from his lawyer declaring that Burke's family fortune has been restored and that patents from his own inventions have earned him a large sum of money. In the final scene of the novel, on the eve of their wedding night, Ball reveals that Burke has quit the police force and will become Mr. Barton's business partner (287). This plot development allows Burke to fully embody the tenets of heroism in the novel by becoming one of the presumably good capitalists who will protect civilization by distributing social assistance to deserving white American men.

Ball's novel affirms middle and upper class sensibilities, while calling these men to action to defend their civilization against the scourge of the immigrant lower classes. Trubus, the embodiment of the novel's arguments concerning upper class corruption, necessarily fails. The novel calls into question the moral fortitude and pursuits of the upper classes, but refrains from suggesting that money corrupts morality as the film does. Rather, the redistribution of money from the upper classes according to standards established by the upper classes becomes the solution to social issues, and white slavery is only one manifestation of these social issues. Burke's transformation from the "prince of the rookies" to an independently wealthy business man preserves the very same conservative economic and class structures attacked in the film (Ball 288).

## Conclusion

The different discourses of masculinity in both versions of *Traffic in Souls* demonstrate the various contradictions involved in the project of remaking masculinity, but the tensions between the different visions of heroism reappear eleven years later in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. World War I had a fundamental impact on conceptions of heroism in the time between the two narratives, and attributed masculine heroism to the latent qualities within individual soldiers—a vision more in line with Burke's depiction in the film. Significantly, the male heroes in *The Great Gatsby* are veterans. Gatsby first recognizes Nick as a fellow veteran before recognizing him as his neighbor, and while Gatsby “represented everything for which I have an unaffected scorn,” Nick ultimately admits that “Gatsby turned out all right in the end” (12). Though the men have little in common aside from their military past, it does not seem coincidental that Fitzgerald bestows his sympathetic male characters with veteran status.

Tom Buchanan's wealth seems to have protected him from World War I, and he is both Nick's and Gatsby's antithesis. While Nick assures readers that “I'm inclined to reserve all judgments” because “reserving judgments is a matter of infinite hope,” he quickly revises this policy concerning Tom (11). At an awkward dinner party at the Buchanan mansion early in the story, Tom reveals that “*The Rise of the Coloured Empire* by Goddard” is his current reading material and according to the book, “civilization's going to pieces” and consequently “it's up to us, who are dominant race, to watch out or these other races will have control of things” (24-25). The rhetoric of Tom's book invokes many of the very same theories espoused by the men in Ball's *Traffic in Souls*, and within this paradigm Tom imagines himself—with other white people—as the heroes of civilization.

But in the wake of Tom's comments, Nick reflects: "there was something pathetic in his concentration as if his complacency, more acute than of old, was not enough to him anymore" (25). For Nick, Tom's racist—and likely classist ideologies, considering Nick's distrust of Tom's wealth—are worth reviling. Rather than save civilization, Nick concludes that "They were careless people, Tom and Daisy—they smashed things up and creatures and then retreated back into their money" (222). Analogous to the film version of *Traffic in Souls*, *The Great Gatsby* suggests that the wealthy have a detrimental effect on the people beneath them. There is not hope for Tom Buchanan, and thus he receives the novel's judgment, if not its justice.

What relevance might a 1913 film and its novelization have now, a hundred years later? The tensions between masculinity, heroism, and classism revealed by *Traffic in Souls* have an afterlife in *The Great Gatsby*, and perhaps even into our own contemporary moment. Economic inequality is hardly a resolved issue, and as American income disparity becomes even more stratified, the wealthy are both despised by the public and urged by the same public to pay more taxes for the sake of social assistance. One of the most baffling contradictions emerging from the increased attention on income disparity is the willingness for the white working class—especially men—to consistently vote against their economic interests. This pattern mirrors Mr. Barton's assertion in the novel that the capitalist system that disenfranchises working class men should be left intact. He believes this even though at the time of his speech, Mr. Barton is unemployable due to a disability obtained on the job. My question is then what mechanism enables Ball's century-old rhetoric to reappear today?

I find a partial answer in the afterlife of Benjamin Franklin's ideology of the self-made man. In both versions of *Traffic in Souls*, masculine heroism hails from the individual. Even if heroism is dependent on money, as it is for Ball's heroic capitalists,

the accumulation of money is still the result of individual action. The emphasis on the individual in both texts reveals that though the concept of the self-made man was troubled in the Progressive Era, it by no means left the cultural imagination (Bederman 10).

The government has no place in the construction of the self-made man. Men who accept governmental social assistance forfeit their right to be self-made men, and those conscribed to provide money for governmental social programs are denied the just rewards of their self-made success. According to Mr. Barton, should social assistance be conducted through the government, the most successful self-made men are denied their status as the heroes of American civilization. It is this fervent belief in the self-made man which demands the return of Burke's fortune, and allows a man like Cliven Bundy to attain hero status when he resists federal law in the name of personal sovereignty.<sup>2</sup> Though *Traffic in Souls* appeared a century ago, the ideology of the self-made man remains, and thus even in our contemporary political moment we too are "borne back ceaselessly into the past" (Fitzgerald 224).

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<sup>2</sup> Cliven Bundy captured national attention when he refused to remove his cattle from federal land and has drawn polarizing responses from liberals and conservatives (Nagourney 1).

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